Six Ese'ejja Myths

recorded by María Alejandra Verna in 1982

Adapted from:

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Translated from Spanish to English

by Eric Paul Bredvik (revised by Jan Jokisch),

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Origin of the Tiger

Adapted from: pp. 66-67 in the primary source
Narrator: Pedro Machuqui
Time of recording: 1982

Biá [jaguar] was a youth that shouted as the jaguar shouts. Edósiquiana said to him: »What are you doing?« »I am imitating the jaguar,« the youth replied to him. »What jaguar if there is no jaguar? Then you will be no more,« Edósiquiana said to him. Then he opened wide the eyes of the boy, pulled the tail and squeezed his legs until he thinned them. The youth shouted, »Don't kill me!« »I will not kill you, I'm only opening your eyes,« said Edósiquiana. »Oi! You've scoured my eyes,« said the youth. Edósiquiana painted his eyelids and his whole face black and said to him, »Speak now as if you were talking, do this: ›Uh! Uh! Uh!‹ and you will be bold and you will eat the man and his wife when he comes to the river to fish.« The jaguar replied, »I will eat him if he does not have a weapon.«

Origin of the Armadillo

Adapted from: p. 67 in the primary source
Narrator: Pedro Machuqui
Time of recording: 1982

Téhui [armadillo] was a person and one day said to his sister, »What is this basket for?« »It is a toy of your niece, it is for the

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behind,« she responded, putting the basket on his hip. »It is for your nose as well,« and put it on his nose. Once again Téhui asked, »What is this knife for?« »It's a toy of your niece,« said his sister. »Put it on me,« said the armadillo, placing it between his fingers. He also found a hole and asked, »Sister, what is this hole for?« »It is for your niece to play,« she responded. Clearing the earth the armadillo entered the hole and when he wanted to leave he could not, even though his sister pulled his tail for a long time even then she could not bring him out. Thus his animal form stayed as it is now.

Origin of Caiman

Adapted from:	p. 67 in the primary source
Narrator:	Calixto Calliaú
Time of recording:	1982

Shaejjámi [caiman] was Ese'ejja [human] and lived on the bank of the river. There was a toad, tapacáca, that had fire. One day this man, tapacáca, met with shaejjámi, he set fire to him and the caiman began to burn. He burned strongly for a long time, and this person, shaejjámi, came out in the form of a caiman. Angrily, he killed tapacáca and said, »I am caiman now, when any Ese'ejja bathes in the river, I will eat him, he will serve as my food.« This is why the caiman now bites and eats the people who bathe where he is.

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Origin of Birds

Adapted from: p. 68 in the primary source
Narrator: Pedro Machuqui
Time of recording: 1982

Pachichóne[1] was a man, one day he wanted to force himself on his sister-in-law, but she had a spike in her breast, a very hard spike. »Your brother puts it in me from behind,« she told him. »No matter, I am going to just put it in you like that,« answered Pachichóne. The brother-in-law didn't pay attention, he put it in and got stabbed. Months and months passed and Pachichóne did not heal. And he could not heal anymore. The other etiiquiana [ancient men] got angry and said, »We are going to kill him, we will kill him once and for all.« They went to look for him to arrow him. Different times they arrowed him but Pachichóne did not die because they didn't hit the heart; until one came and hit the middle and so killed him. All ate the flesh of Pachichóne, leaving only his bones. From these the birds formed themselves. From the fingernails came the beaks of some small birds. The beak of the toucan, for example, came from the leg bone, that's why it has a big beak. From Pachichóne all the birds formed their beaks, their feet, their bodies. In the middle of the beach[2] there was a tree, the májo

[1] Pachichóne is the Ese'ejja word to denote the cusi palm (*Orbignya phalerata*).
[2] In the seasonal cycle of the area we are dealing with, two periods can be distinguished: One dry and the other rainy. During the first, between the months of May and October, rainfall is scarce so that the level of the rivers decreases, leaving enormous beaches uncovered. The natives take advantage of this period

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[almendrillo; probably *Oenocarpus bataua*]. Those birds that walked on the ground, when they saw that tree, they went up and piled up there. From so much weight, its branches groaned and groaned, until its branches broke, scattering all the birds. Then they flew from one place to another all over the world because their wings had already formed. From those broken branches came the trees, and the bush was formed as we have it now.

Origin of Agriculture

Adapted from: p. 69 in the primary source

Narrator: Pedro Machuqui

Time of recording: 1982

Once there was a man, Docuei'ai who first made a little chaco [field].[3] Later he said to the other Ese'ejja, »Listen! Why are you sleeping instead of working or making fields for your children?« So all those lazy people that were aná [giant anteaters] went to see how many meters Docuei'ai had cleared to make his field. Once he saw it, aná said: »You have done little Docuei'ai, it is not enough. I will beat you at clearing,« commented the anteater. There they all went and some of them worked

to build rudimentary huts there and dedicate themselves to collecting turtle eggs and fishing.

[3] Chacos are cultivation plots of approximately 1 or 2 hectares, without any type of fence to prevent intruders from entering. In the area visited, they do not exceed this size due to the physical and economic effort involved in clearing, given the rudimentary agricultural implements used.

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with hatchet and machete. Many meters aná cleared, he made pampas like this one that is now. He worked so hard all day that he made pampas out of the tall bush. His arm swelled up from so much clearing and then he came out in the shape of an anteater because before he was a person. When Docuoi'ai went to his field he already did not find it, he asked aná where the bush he had cleared was. »It is there,« the aná answered him. In the middle of that pampa that aná had made was Docuei'ai's field. As soon as he arrived, those aná set fire to it and burned everything. Docuei'ai, who had been left in the middle of the fire, asked for help because he was already burning. Edósiquiana heard his shouts and went to save the poor brocket, who was his son. »Papa, papa I am burning,« shouted Docuei'ai. Edósiquiana got closer and asked, »Who has set you on fire?« »It was the fault of aná, he wanted to kill me,« he responded. Edósiquiana lifted him in his arms but he was almost completely burned. It is because of this that Docuei'ai is partially dark and doesn't have much fur. Edósiquiana carried him to a place very far away. An old lady who was the mother of aná was there. This old woman had an earthenware jar with boiling water. Then Docuei'ai asked her, »What is that jar for?« The old woman answered, »To stew the brocket.« Docuei'ai thought, »The only brocket is me.« »How are you going to do it?« he asked interrogatingly. »I'm going to stew it well,« she answered. The old woman sat down to show how she would do it and then Docuei'ai took advantage and pushed her into the pot and covered it until it boiled. When it was well cooked, he placed it on a banana leaf to eat it. He had almost finished

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his meal when he heard her children arrive, shouting: »Mama, mommy, what are you cooking that smells so tasty?« Several times they shouted but no one answered. Docuei'ai, seeing that they were getting closer and closer, ran to the bush. Again the aná shouted but they still did not hear their mother answer. Then they said: »It was Docuei'ai who has surely eaten our mother.« They took their machetes and went to the bush to search for him. They put a trap in the middle of the trail and waited close by for the brocket. A while later the trap caught the Docuei'ai. He wanted to get out and pulled his arm, so it became skinny, like his arm is now. He wanted to free his head, he pulled and his neck became very small and skinny. Indeed he didn't have much meat, so he lay down and stayed like he was dead.

Origin of the Pucarara (Southern American bushmaster) and of Other Vipers

Adapted from: pp. 70-71 in the primary source
Narrator: Pedro Machuqui
Time of recording: 1982

This woman, who was the daughter of the vultures and who had married Docuei'ai, continued walking in search of another husband since the brocket had gone to the bush. She walked for a long time until she found the snake, the pit viper. He was a person and then said to her, »I don't even have enough teeth to eat a little mouse.« The girl said to him, »I will

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make you teeth with this thorn.« She made them and put them in. »Well, let's try it,« said majjásha, the pit viper. He tried it on the woman's hair and it bent. »Let's try somewhere else,« he said again. The pit viper bit the girl and she died. Her sister managed to escape, but from behind came majjásha, following her. She arrived at a man who asked her, »What are you doing here?« »The pit viper is coming, following me, please help me!« she answered. »I will defend you, but hide inside my daquidei,« said the man. When majjásha arrived, he asked the man if he had seen a woman coming. »There is no one around here,« answered the man. The pit viper sniffed around and said to him, »This is where that girl has gotten to.« »She's not here, go somewhere else, she's already gone,« said the man. »No, she is here, I am smelling her, she is around here,« answered majjásha. The angry man grabbed his machete and dealt him several machete blows until he broke his neck into a few pieces. From each of these pieces came out the snakes of the whole world. The woman then wanted to marry this man who had defended her. They just lived together for a few weeks because her husband kept turning into an animal. His wife had become pregnant and one day she walked and arrived to where the jaguar lived with his sister. This one said to her brother the jaguar, »Brother, a lady has arrived and said that you are a pig.« »Now I will kill her,« said the jaguar, shouting and bellowing. When the pregnant woman saw him, she hid inside a thick tacuara. The jaguar searched and searched everywhere. When he grabbed the tacuara where the woman was, he heard a noise like this: Cha, cha, chachararararai! It

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was the necklace of teeth of this woman that sounded like this inside the tacuara. The jaguar broke the trunk open and ate the whole woman and the boy too. But the boy escaped through the beast's backside and went to where his grandmother was and when she saw him she covered him with a tutuma.[4] The jaguar was pleased after having eaten the girl. Just a little later his sister came and said to him, »Brother, the woman you ate was pregnant.« »Howcome you didn't tell me?« replied the jaguar. But after a short time the boy had grown up and was wandering everywhere on his own. His grandmother told him to be careful because the jaguars could eat him like his mother. One day he went to the bush and saw a chonta palm tree and another chima, he returned home and asked his grandmother to help him fell them. »With these branches I will make weapons to take revenge on the jaguar that killed my mother,« said the boy to his grandmother. When the bow and arrow were ready, the boy went to his enemy, the jaguar. He tried to shoot it several times but it did not die, the arrows did not kill it. When he tried with the salón[5] he killed it with just one shot.

[4] The tutumo (*Crescentia cujete*) is a regional crop tree whose fruit the natives call tutuma. It has an oval-shaped pericarp with a diameter of about 18 cm. It is split in the middle, the pulp is extracted and left to dry in the sun, so it will acquire a hard consistency. It is widely used by Ese'ejja women in all domestic chores.

[5] The salón is a very rudimentary rifle, .22 caliber, single shot.

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